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## GETTING MEN BACK ON THE LAND

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THE war and its consequent disturbance of our industry has brought before us in accentuated form a problem that has long been growing—the proper distribution of our people. As compared with rural communities, the cities have had a tremendous relative increase. Few of us have appreciated the bane of their overgrowth. The chief functions of the cities are dual—to assemble labor for manufacturing production, and to serve the purposes of distribution.

The labor-saving device of propinquity is carried to such an extreme as to rescatter the assembled people throughout suburban areas. Traffic congestion necessitates surface, overhead, and underground communication, until the expense of the Panama Canal sinks into insignificance when compared with that of the intramural transportation of New York; while inflated property values and rents in accordance, are a perpetual burden.

No one could have conceived such an aggregation of waste as cities afford, and yet their social attractions cause the moths to seek the candle, their sheer mass seems to create a power like that of gravitation. They defy all principles of supply and demand. Men needed elsewhere, and superfluous in the cities, find means for forcing a livelihood in the excess population. Somehow or other they create a place for themselves and become a burden upon necessary production. A census of urban population ministering to the useless and extravagant elements of city life would comprise a large portion of city dwellers. Even the mechanics engaged in enlarging the overgrown cities are wasting time and material.

The waste is largely of human material. During years of vast immigration influx, the cities have absorbed and misapplied the services of millions of people who left rural employment in Europe and found here no outlet for their trained

capacity. To the cities and towns have gone many of the most vigorous and energetic of our native rural population.

Country life has been dull and lonely, and latterly only those with considerable means need apply with expectation of reasonable independence.

Every undeserved accretion of urban population means advancing land values, and wasteful employment in serving the needs of ill-placed and unproductive people, who are either doing the wrong thing, or doing the right thing in the wrong place.

On this account our per capita food supplies have steadily diminished, despite our vast land areas, and upon the food supply must rest our national permanence and prosperity.

The spread between prices received by the farmer and paid by the consumer has not been reduced by our boasted methods of distribution and intermediate handling, but instead has increased.

Simple forms of packing have been superseded by the costly can and carton. Monopoly has taken a large mouthful, and neither public nor private agencies have sufficiently sought to save waste, or to fill void areas from areas of surplus.

The tide of population must be turned. It cannot be turned except to lands now uncultivated. Our coming farmers must be assured of adequate reward for well-directed effort, and must find in the farmer's life, from day to day, such social conditions as afford a satisfactory answer to the great riddle: "What are we here for?"

We have been moving west in our agricultural operations. The theory of the "margin of cultivation" has been at work, but the tendency to abandon farms near to great markets has been due to other factors—to bad farming, bad marketing, lack of credit and capital, and to unnecessary soil depletion. Parallel with this abandonment we find sporadic patches producing profitable yields under intensive truck gardening and small-fruit culture, showing how far the abandoned areas are really above the "margin."

The pioneer conditions under which our northern Atlantic states were settled were hard, but the settlers' demands for many things that are now considered necessities were small. Food and clothing and a small surplus for barter were secured under

primitive agricultural methods, with little capital and much labor.

In the South the institution of slavery and the heedless depletion of soil fertility due to farming methods and to the soil strain of the staple crops, cotton and tobacco, caused a continuing migration to virgin or more fertile lands, an insistent demand for fresh slave territory which finally caused the Civil War. The utter impoverishment of the South and the unfamiliarity of the white man with manual labor were supplemented by the backwardness of the Negro.

Throughout the expanse of the abandoned and undeveloped portions of the south Atlantic states are examples of the wonderful production to be obtained on lands, which, though often initially infertile, possess the advantage of long seasons, adequate rainfall, and good drainage.

The cut-over areas of the north central and northwestern states often possess soil fertility, but the problem of digging out stumps and clearing by the unaided toil of the individual, offers an appalling vista of unproductive years. We have never taken sufficiently into account the loss incident to the time taken by manual labor to clear and subdue farm lands. It is simple to show the slowly increasing production that goes on with acre-by-acre clearing and with the soul-destroying irritation of plowing amidst stumps.

The irrigation areas vary in productivity. However rosy may be the prospect of crops insured against drought and often climatically exempt from frost damage, there is little that is cheering to the settler without capital. Oftentimes he has invested his all in his initial payment. Without adequate housing, without horses, he faces the unbroken sage brush and the unleveled land. His pitiful efforts with hand tools are interspersed with working for wages, till often broken in pocket and spirit, he abandons fertile soil with water at hand, because he cannot make connection with natural resources where capital or credit is lacking. Grubbing sage brush with a mattock is a criminal waste of life when a tractor will tear out and break eight acres a day. While many successes have been recorded, there is throughout the West the remembrance of countless tragic and unnecessary failures, with the prospect of many more, until the time comes that settlement means application

of labor directly to production, and not the mere placing of a human body on a fenced piece of land.

It is trite to state that agricultural production calls for land, labor and capital, but to most of us it has not been so clear that the necessary ingredients are needed in widely divergent ratios. Prairie farming has called for much land and comparatively little labor or capital. It has been subject to extreme costs between production and consumption. These costs may be largely remedied, but there will always be required comparatively long hauls and expensive freight charges to reach foreign markets or the largest centers of American population.

Truck gardening near the market requires little land, small capital, and immense labor, with no inherently heavy charge for selling, but a considerable risk on account of the perishable nature of the produce.

Fruit growing calls for varying amounts of land and labor, but for considerable capital to await production, and great risk from natural causes and often from the uncertainties of market conditions.

The prairie lands yielding cheaply staple grains and live stock are practically all taken up.

Future development must be found in reclamation of various sorts. There still remain portions of the arid public domain where irrigation may be promoted. This involves large capital investment.

There are areas that can be reclaimed from swamps, with varying costs which must be met wholesale. But chiefly to be relied on for extent are the abandoned lands and the unused lands of the East and the cut-over lands of the South and of the Northwest.

The problem in each case is to secure and economically to apply the large capital fund necessary to make land immediately productive.

In some cases water must be supplied; in some cases drainage must be obtained. Here we must clear off stumps and brush, and there we must supply and develop soil fertility.

The problems of settlement involve doing these things with machinery, doing them rapidly, and on an immense scale.

The lands of greatest fertility, where the least capital and

labor are required for production, have increased tremendously in selling value.

Under our fee-simple tenure, there is in some places a continuing tendency to aggregate into large holdings farmed by hired labor, or by tenants. Otherwheres we find a breaking-up of large speculative holdings, but everywhere an increase of private tenancy, which is an admitted menace to our social and economic welfare.

Whatever may be the abstract ethics of rent or interest charge, it is not well for people to live in idleness on the product of others. No restrictions of leases in private tenant contracts can prevent wasteful, careless farming, with the natural tendency and temptation to soil depletion and heedlessness of upkeep that go with temporary and shifting occupation.

The policy of land settlement is far bigger than the immediate provision for soldiers and sailors. It should not be confined to war displacement. If opportunities are to be offered, there is justice in showing first preference for those who have risked their lives for the republic, and then next to those whose occupations and employment have been overturned or destroyed by war emergency or its ending.

But there must be a redistribution and a procession "back to the land," whether soldiers and sailors wish to lead it, or whether others shall avail themselves of the chances. Somewhere we must find those who by inclination and qualification are willing under favoring circumstances to undertake the task of increasing our food supply.

First, let us consider the question of inclination. It has long been recognized that farm life is hard and lonesome. Our prairies, largely held in quarter sections, placed people half a mile apart. The natural requirements of social life were denied them, and the town and city had an irresistible fascination. We have but to consider how wide a departure this is from the village rural life of Europe to see where the remedy must lie. We must more and more work toward community life, such as is now possible under the intensive farming of irrigation districts. Land holdings will normally tend to become smaller, with equal output due to better methods, and community life must be given a proper development. The parcels post, the telephone, the cheap automobile, are all work-

ing toward closer association. Co-operative use of tractors, abandonment of useless fences with their waste patches and weed beds, and the use of the latest farming machinery will also urge this tendency in days to come. Scientific agriculture and technical education that makes it possible will, when coupled with community life, tend to stabilize farm life—as a satisfactory and permanent career.

No settlement policy can be solvent unless it carefully discriminates in the selection of those who are to be given opportunity. They must be interested, able-bodied, capable, and qualified. Agriculture, no more than school teaching, is a proper recourse for tag-enders and failures. Settlers must be aided by the careful selection and preparation of land, and by advances of capital to bring such land into production, when supplemented by the settler's labor, and any policy not inherently solvent would be an intolerable burden and an element of evil to any country that tried it. Settlers must be taught what to do and how to do it, not out of books of theory, but from pages of actual local experience.

A careful study of the situation, of the large capital needed, and the narrow margin that should be charged for rendering the service of land settlement, leads to the view that it should not be left to private initiative. It is essentially a public service. There should be intimate co-operation between the states and the nation in any land-settlement policy. It is true that such settlement might be carried through, as in the past, through irrigation and reclamation projects on portions of the public domain and entirely by the federal government, but these are necessarily subject to state taxation and to a measure of state control, without any definite co-operation agreement with the nation.

The states could perform the service independently of the federal government, as California is now doing on a small scale. But the problem is one of national importance to which the national credit should be lent, and a greater degree of uniformity could be assured through national supervision and assistance.

The state, with its well-defined taxing power, can best handle such questions as road building, where benefits should be assessed against the land profiting by improvements.

Funds expended in the states by the federal government are as a general matter spent and gone without possibility of recovery, as is evidenced in our river and harbor appropriations. Uncle Sam can pay damages, but cannot assess benefits.

In the case of reclamation projects, government expenditures are added to the per acre price of lands reclaimed, but there are often general benefits outside the reclaimed area which should be paid for by others than the specific settlers.

Any state with a self-respecting sense of its responsibilities and a desire for orderly progress would naturally better comprehend its immediate needs and conditions and better meet them than a centralized authority in distant Washington.

Let us turn for a moment to consider the question of farm credits. That question, as furnishing a productive agency, is not reached and hardly even approached in the United States, by any means, private or public. Benefit has accrued to farmers and to investors by the creation of our land credit system, which supplements the private agencies that have heretofore lent funds on mortgages. But lending money on mortgages bears the same relation to production in the agricultural field, as does pawnbroking or collateral loans by banks, in commercial transactions. The owner of the most available standard land worth perhaps \$200 per acre can easily borrow from private investors up to \$100 an acre. The funds may be used to buy more land, or for any other purpose, productive or otherwise. But consider the case of a borrower who would subdue a piece of brush land worth \$5 an acre or one who would plant to orchard land of small value, with the need of waiting years for returns that eventually would be large. Consider the case of one who, by years of cultivation and the use of expensive fertilizer, would make barren sand permanently productive.

There are innumerable cases where advance amounting to ten times the value of the raw land involved would be paid out of but few intensive and valuable crops.

It is as necessary to furnish a credit system to meet such requirements as it is that banks should furnish credit for mercantile and manufacturing operations.

Mortgage loans at reasonable rates are a benefit, but in a sense offer an example of "To him that hath shall be given," and the tenant is hopelessly barred.



The machinery that will safeguard such productive credit has been created in other countries, and differs in no essential particular from the security obtained for mercantile advances. It is a question of organization of local units under a general system, so that eventually a comparatively small number of neighbors guarantee and watch each other, with the penalty of loss of future credit for delinquency.

Under an adequate plan of settlement, these credit needs would be recognized at the outset. It is necessary to consider them to make the question of the needed element of capital clear.

As we enter the field of concrete illustration, I urge as one of the most important factors in any system of settlement the question of the form of tenure upon which such settlement should be based. We take for granted the evils of tenancy. We also take for granted the wrong that arises from withholding land from production, also unearned profits derived through land speculation. We also recognize clearly that society should demand not only full use of land, but undiminished and even increased productivity. We recognize that government should prevent destruction as found in the millions of acres hopelessly eroded, most notably in some of the southern states, and deliberately destroyed by gold dredging, as practiced in some of the most fertile and productive areas of California.

In accordance with the free and easy verbiage of royal tradition, we bestow land in fee simple, to "Richard Roe and to his heirs and assigns forever." This is indeed a full grant for a considerable period, if we take note of the formula. We next inform Richard that we propose to levy whatever taxes we see fit upon his property. We then inform him that as far as his heirs are concerned, they can, at his death, dispose of it at forced sale, and pay a part of the resultant proceeds to the state and another to the nation. Some states compel him to cultivate and to eliminate weeds; others tell him how he shall cut his wood lot. Poor Richard is everywhere met with a denial of the high sounding words of his title deed. The limitations are neither coherent, uniform or rational, nor do they touch the evils of tenancy or speculation.

Why should we not in our future planning avoid this process

of giving, and subsequently taking away, by providing for permanent tenure under such conditions, that make unnecessary this subsequent remedial control. There is one way in which it can be done, a way recognized in other countries, most notably in the Australian commonwealth and in New Zealand, and that is by giving a limited title at the beginning, subject to resumption by the state on violation of specific regulations.

Now let us see how our plan might work out. Let us say, that there can be found in the State of New Jersey a tract of ten thousand acres now lying waste, which, by the application of adequate capital, can in two or three years be made productive for qualified and selected settlers. Let the State of New Jersey buy that land at the lowest possible price. Thereafter the state should invite the federal government to look it over, and see whether it is of such a nature that the nation will cooperate in its settlement. Once the federal government has accepted the project, then men and machinery should be put at work to clear, level, and to apply such elements to the soil as are needed for production. There would be no long drawn out misery, of grubbing and clearing by hand, but less eventual cost per acre, and less time consumed in the process. The land being cleared and prepared, the federal government should provide funds for necessary buildings, with domicile either on the property itself or in a central village. The federal government should furthermore advance through co-operative local credit-centers sufficient funds for needed personal property in farm implements and live stock. Before the settler goes on, it should be in such condition as to produce crops in the next growing season.

The settler, carefully selected and required to make at least a small payment for his holding, should thereafter be subject to pay to the state for a set period of not less than twenty years a fixed sum, as interest on the original purchase price—this to the state in lieu of land tax. That such interest payment might cover insurance for delinquencies and expenses, the rate should probably be 6 per cent. The settler would also be liable to the Government for amortization payments on personal property in not more than ten annual installments, together with interest at 4 or 5 per cent. He should furthermore be liable to the Government for amortization payments on the cost of permanent

improvements and clearing and putting the land in condition, which payments might run over a period of thirty to forty years, at 4 to 5 per cent.

Permanency of tenure could be assured, subject to proper cultivation, although the fee-simple title would not pass out of the state. The right of inheritance would be respected, subjecting the successor to the same terms as the devisee. A man could give his property to anyone satisfactory to a local board composed of state and federal representatives, but no one could secure this limited title without assurance that the individual who took it proposed to work the land under the restrictions set forth. Every safeguard should be placed around his tenure, as against the accidents of life, so that the occupant would feel secure, even through crop failure or other destructive hardship. If the settler desired for any cause to move from his land, he should be permitted to sell his contributions to the property to a person satisfactory to the board. In addition, this board should stand ready to re-purchase the property in the event of no purchaser being immediately available, paying him all that he had contributed by amortization and by his own work. He should be paid the then value of improvements added by him, and the then value of improvements supplied by the Government, less the unpaid debt against them. He should be credited with added soil fertility and value of orchard at the time of removal. His allotment could then be again turned over at the sum ascertained to some one willing to carry out the conditions of his contract.

Here is a plan that eliminates a large part of the element of pioneer hardship and risk—a plan that makes land speculation impossible, and one that destroys private tenancy. It can be developed along lines that make rural life more attractive, and if carefully administered, it is above all a solvent plan that, while paying itself off out of product, is a permanent enrichment of the state and the country.

The speculation privilege, with the unconscionable profit derived from the needs and the breeding capacity of other people, is eliminated, but there is also eliminated at the other end the struggle and misery accompanied by tremendous percentage of failure, in cases where an individual tries to dig out a livelihood, under conditions unnecessary and even misunder-

stood, and where he usually lacks the capital needed to make his effort count at the critical time, which is at the beginning.

As a final general idea, I wish to state that in my opinion the greatest need and the greatest possibility for such a settlement is near the Atlantic coast, where population is worst distributed, where millions of acres of available land is lying waste, and where the demands of a hungry market are close at hand. The difference between corn and wheat values between Omaha and New York are upwards of 25c a bushel. It is an unmitigated absurdity, that with the eastern states pre-eminently qualified to raise the best of apples, we should be forced to secure our supplies by freight from distant Oregon. Almost any land will raise potatoes, which have been selling at prices unconscionably high.

The needed application of credit and labor can best be made by the co-operative effort of the states and nation. Again, let me say that nothing excepting the retention of title by the state or the nation can fend against the reaccumulation of developed areas into large holdings, with the recurrence of the evils of speculation and tenancy.

We are, after all, but tenants of the world and of the state. We may be deprived of life and liberty at the will of the Government of which we are a part. Are we wronged if in future agricultural settlement, where much of the element of risk is eliminated, and where immediate means of livelihood are supplied—if with such opportunity conferred—we are denied the privilege of profiting by the effort of others, and prevented from profiteering out of the common need for land?

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